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'Paralysis' in Soviet Decision-Making Seen Hampering Arms Control Talks

Associated Press

A three-year "paralysis" in Soviet decision-making, brought about by two leadership changes, has "severely hampered" U.S. efforts to reach arms control agreements, a top State Department official said yesterday.

Lawrence S. Eagleburger, undersecretary for political affairs, said that since the Reagan administration took office, the Soviets have not had the kind of leadership capable of making difficult decisions and accepting responsibility for them.

"Virtually without exception, each time the Soviets have been faced with difficult choices, we have witnessed a period of apparent internal debate, followed inevitably by hard-line decisions clearly dictated by the most conservative elements in the Politburo," Eagleburger said.

His assessment apparently was in

response to administration critics who blame President Reagan for the failure of Moscow and Washington to reach arms control agreements.

Eagleburger's remarks were prepared for delivery to a foreign policy conference in Birmingham, Ala. A text of his speech was released by the State Department.

Eagleburger, the department's third-ranking official, said the administration has worked hard to put forward sensible arms control proposals.

"Yet, for now, at least, all we have to show for it is a Soviet walkout from the two most important arms control negotiations," he said, referring to the talks on reducing intercontinental and medium-range nuclear weapons. He said that when the administration took office, Soviet President Leonid I. Brezhnev

was "aging and ailing," and his colleagues were positioning themselves for the succession.

Yuri V. Andropov, who succeeded Brezhnev in November, 1982, was seriously ill for much of his short tenure, Eagleburger said, and Konstantin U. Chernenko, who became Communist Party leader six weeks ago, "has yet to establish himself."

"This flux in the Kremlin has severely hampered the give-and-take of diplomacy in general," Eagleburger said, "and of our arms control talks in particular."

He said the lesson of the past three years is that the Soviet decision-making apparatus—in the absence of strong leadership that is prepared to exercise its authority—"is likely to seek refuge in a bureaucratically safe but substantively sterile hard line."



LAWRENCE S. EAGLEBURGE
... "All we have is a Soviet walk